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farthest away, deepest within

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines my interdisciplinary art practice and its reliance on time-intensive processes through a discussion of concepts, practice, and development. Discussed are the research and philosophies underlying the concepts of this body of work, including the aesthetic movement of the Sublime and the nature of humanity. This discussion contextualizes my practice alongside several contemporary artists examined in this paper: Vija Celmins, Olafur Eliasson, Ran Ortner, James Turrell, and Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison. I detail how their practices and concepts relate to and inform my own, including the metaphors found in my choice of time-intensive practices, and how they serve to embed the work with my content. Lastly, my artistic development and growth prior and throughout graduate school is also traced, and how these changes resulted in the culmination of this body of work. At the conclusion of my paper and bibliography are my curriculum vitae, artist's statement, images, and image list.

Chapter One: Concepts

My artwork presents the beauty of natural wonders as a meditation, demanding time and attention in both making and viewing. I am interested in metaphysics, astronomy, space and time, nature, the environment, and how each of these speaks to the inevitable fallibility of the human condition. Present are fiber and photography sensibilities as well as bookbinding structures, containers encouraging viewer interaction, printmaking, and perhaps most importantly, the idea of process as content. Although I pull freely from different media and techniques, one unifying force is the element of time and labor invested. The slow process of creating relates to the marvel of our own creation, and serves as a metaphor for the inherent struggles of humanity to find meaning behind our existence. I often utilize the process of stitching as the vehicle to communicate these ideas, as thread speaks of the quest for connection by serving as the point of that connection in both imagery and function.

Much of my practice involves the development of my content, often born from an internal struggle resulting from extensive reading, writing, and research. Often the reading of science and philosophy is the core of my intellectual interest, and acts as the catalyst for my conceptual ideas. Once the idea is formed it guides the choice of medium and process most appropriate for the project. Projects such as these require a symbiosis between the process and the concept, and I endeavor to maintain this equilibrium to successfully convey my content. My thesis work, largely comprised of my stop-motion animations of embroidery pressure prints entitled *Once the wondrous vastness filled us, Now we fill the wondrous vastness*, underwent this journey in the finalization of concept and process.

The Sublime

The Sublime movement in painting often showed a lone figure confronted with an immeasurable nature that emphasized the figure's insignificance. The imagery was beautifully rendered, and yet evoked disquiet. In 1764 Immanuel Kant endeavored to define the Sublime with his essay *The Sense of the Beautiful and of the Sublime*, and his musings are still relevant for contemporary artists working in this content. He stressed the difference between the Sublime and that which is merely beautiful. In *The Philosophy of Kant*, Carl J. Friedrich summarized:

“The sublime moves; the expression of a person experiencing the full sense of the sublime is serious, at times rigid and amazed. On the other hand, the vivid sense of the beautiful reveals itself in the shining gaiety of the eyes, by smiling and even by noisy enjoyment. The sublime, in turn, is at times accompanied by some terror or melancholia, in some cases merely by quiet admiration and in still others by the beauty which is spread over a sublime place.” (Friedrich 2013)

Painter Ran Ortner is one contemporary artist dealing with the topic of the Sublime. In an article for *Sun Magazine*, writer Ariane Conrad describes his large-scale, incredibly realistic paintings of tumultuous oceans (Fig. 1): “The paintings are not about the oceans at all, but are instead tapestries of our human condition... Because of its subject matter, Ortner’s work is sometimes compared to that of the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich [a leader of the Sublime movement], whose land and seascapes were intended to humble the viewer, put human accomplishments into perspective, and reawaken our appreciation for the natural world.” In Ortner’s own words, “If I could convey the ocean’s paradoxes, its ferocity and tenderness, in the same image, I could



Fig. 1 Ran Ortner, *Element No. 1*, 2013, oil on canvas, 160" x 118"

possibly awaken the viewer to a place where language drops away.” (Conrad 4-12) This is very similar to the reaction I hope to elicit with my thesis work.

Although my artwork is not photo-realistic like that of Ortner, its imagery still calls to mind the Sublime through the wonder of the natural world and our insignificance in the scope of a universe we cannot comprehend. Ken Croswell, author of *The Alchemy*

of the Heavens: Searching for Meaning in the Milky Way, illustrates the unfathomable scale of the space that surrounds us: “An astronomer who tried to map the Milky Way by representing the distance between the Sun and the Earth – 93 million miles – as one inch would need a sheet of paper larger than the entire world in order to capture the Milky Way’s full extent.” (Croswell 2) I want to give my viewers this confounding experience by introducing them to “a place where language drops away,” to use Ortnier’s words, and to awaken in them a feeling of wonder that simultaneously humbles and inspires them. My thesis animations are the works that come closest to reaching this goal. The viewer enters the project room through black felt curtains, and has the opportunity to sit and study the animations, witnessing the growth of the embroidery before them. Every frame of the animation shows an increase in the amount of knots, demonstrating the method of the image’s creation, allowing the viewer to understand the process by which an embroidered image is formed. This speaks to another interest of my work – the element of the experience.

Experience and Phenomena

This is represented in the spectacular installation works of Dutch-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. Eliasson uses science and the study of phenomena to call attention to the beauty of nature by questioning and emphasizing our perceptions that we take for granted. Eliasson’s work is often described as experiential, meaning that the viewer’s interaction completes the piece. I use the word experience to describe the feeling I hope to evoke in my viewers. Another difference between Eliasson and myself is found in our process; in my work the mark of the human hand and the journey of making is of primary

concern. Eliasson utilizes theatrical installations that are often of surprisingly simple construction to offer the viewer a complex visual and perceptual experience, where I make works complex in their undertaking and making that are often simple in their visual aesthetic. It is our shared concepts that provide the majority of my interest in his works. In Eliasson's piece *Beauty* (1993) (Fig. 2), a darkened project room reveals a rainbow hanging in space, existing in the very room with the viewer. It is created through the simple science of a beam of light and a soft, continuous mist of water. Eliasson allows the viewer to exist in a space with a natural phenomenon previously thought to always be fleeting and ever out of reach. Even more, he allows the viewer to share this experience with others in the space, emphasizing our sense of human connection in the wonder of the natural world. For a moment it is more than a beautiful image, it is a reminder that we are not alone, that there is a reason for our existence here in space and time. A rainbow exists because humanity is here to view it; our eyes hold the perfect receptors for the refraction of color through the angle of light and moisture. Author Philip Fisher describes this phenomenon in his book, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experience*: "Each person's rainbow, like his or her reflection in a pool of water, is uniquely determined by the point where he or she stands, by the angle between eye, raindrop, and sun. They are part of the human world. On an uninhabited planet there would continue to be sun and rain, stars, and snow, but there would be no rainbow and no horizon." (Fisher 37) Eliasson removes the solitude that is often present in the discovery of a rainbow by enabling us to each see our own rainbow *together*, in the project room. Susan Stewart speaks to this feeling in her essay "What is Thought Like?":



Fig. 2 Olafur Eliasson, *Beauty*, 1993, water, light.

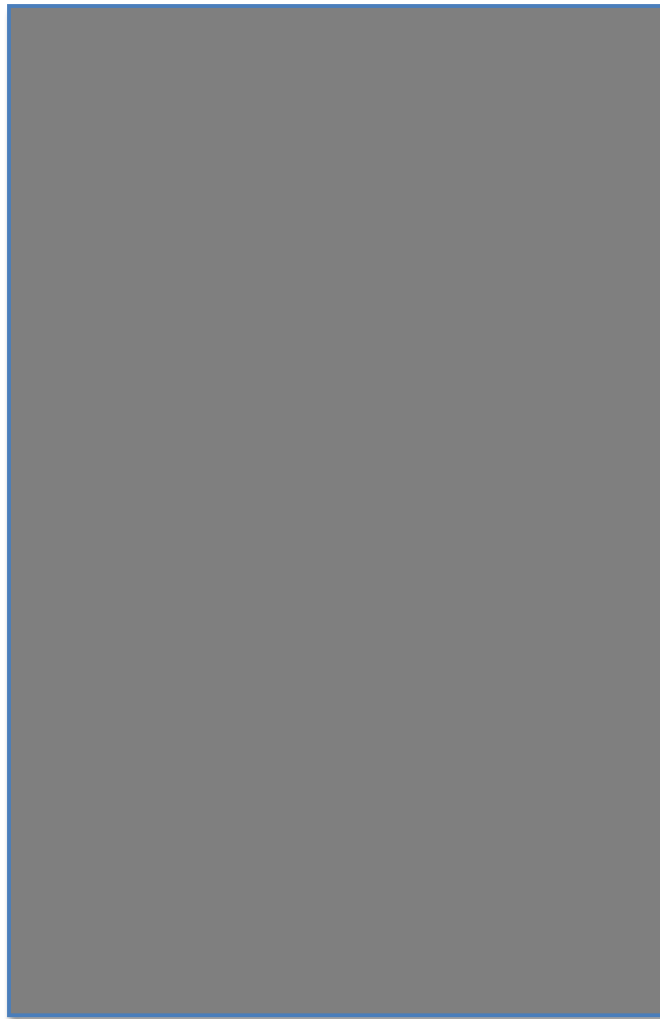
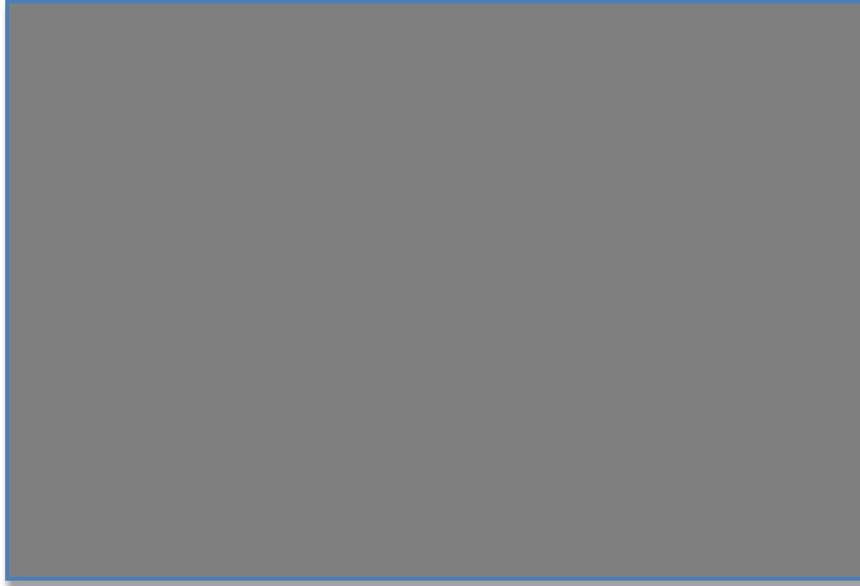
“Behind the silence of the painting or drawing or installation here, as behind the silence of the telescope, this organic flow of noise and activity seethes and bursts. Yet, as we take it in visually, we have access to a stillness of which the phenomena themselves take no part... Through works of art... we search in our vision of forces of nature for some record of the force of our own thought.”
(Stewart 21)

American installation artist James Turrell has much in common with Olafur Eliasson, although the latter is more interested in natural phenomena than the simplicity of our perception and existence, which is what seems to motivate Turrell. Working almost exclusively in the medium of light and our wondrous ability of sight, Turrell also provides his viewers with a self-referential understanding of experience. He has said, “I want to create an atmosphere that can be consciously plumbed with seeing, like the wordless thought that comes from looking in a fire.” (*Art 21*) Turrell’s work involves explorations in light and space that speak to viewers without words, creating impact entirely through perception. This concept directly relates to the aforementioned quote of painter Ran Ortner, who seeks to “awaken the viewer to a place where language drops away.” Ortner, Eliasson, and Turrell all achieve this sense of awe by the emphasis of one of our senses, our sight, with the diminishment of others.

Conceptually, my work also resonates with Turrell’s; his fascination with the marvel of light is ultimately connected to a very personal, inward search for mankind’s place in the universe. He is, perhaps, most renowned for a piece apart from the majority of his installation works – his incredible work-in-progress entitled *Roden Crater* (1979 – present) (Figs. 3 & 4), which is actually an extinct volcano outside Flagstaff, Arizona that Turrell has been transforming into a celestial observatory since 1979. *Art 21* has described him as “working with cosmological phenomena that have interested man since the dawn of civilization. The crater brings heaven to earth, linking the actions of people with the movements of planets and distant galaxies.” The miracle of events that have perfectly unfolded to create the harmony of nature on Earth motivates my own artwork.

Fig. 3 James Turrell, *Roden Crater*, 1979 – present.

Fig. 4 (below) James Turrell, *Roden Crater*, 1979 – present, interior view.



My piece, *Two thousand light years away*, relates to the unfolding of these events and correlates conceptually with Turrell's *Roden Crater*. It is a small embroidery, a miniature representation of the Southern Ring Nebula, achieved through tight French knots of silk thread and an exploration of color, on translucent silk. At the center of this nebula is a dying star, and yet its color, size, and brilliance are unfathomable to us – a symbol of the cycle of life on an unimaginable scale. Our perception of the nebula from our distance of over 2,000 light years away gives us a visual understanding of it as a small phenomenon, something microscopic. And yet, in reality it contains more space than we can possibly comprehend. In Stewart's book *On Longing*, she defines the power of the miniature: "That the world of thing can open itself to reveal a secret life – indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception – is a constant daydream that the miniature presents. This is the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely *within* significance." (Stewart 54) My connection with this perceptual dichotomy is similar to what unites Turrell with his work – a very personal, inward search for mankind's place in the universe. By investing hours of work in a piece of such small scale, I am embedding my energy into the creation of this nebula surrounding a dying star. I am emphasizing that this star shares in the cycle of life of which I am also a part, and with my needle-working endeavor I am raising my voice in recognition, and awe, of its presence.

Humanity and the Environment

The photographs of artist couple Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison discuss humanity's interaction with nature and often allude to the destructive nature of that relationship through an opposing sense of beauty. Through their complex, narrative images, the ParkeHarrisons remind us that we are meant to be in a *symbiotic* relationship with nature and that there is a delicate balance to the earth of which we are to play a small part – not as conquerors but as caregivers. (Figs. 5 & 6) Their statement describes their subject matter perfectly as the “ever-bleakening relationship linking humans, technology, and nature. These works feature an ambiguous narrative that offers insight into the dilemma posed by science and technology's failed promise to fix our problems, provide explanations, and furnish certainty pertaining to the human condition.” (Harrison)

Fig. 5 Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison, *Listening to the Earth*, 2005.



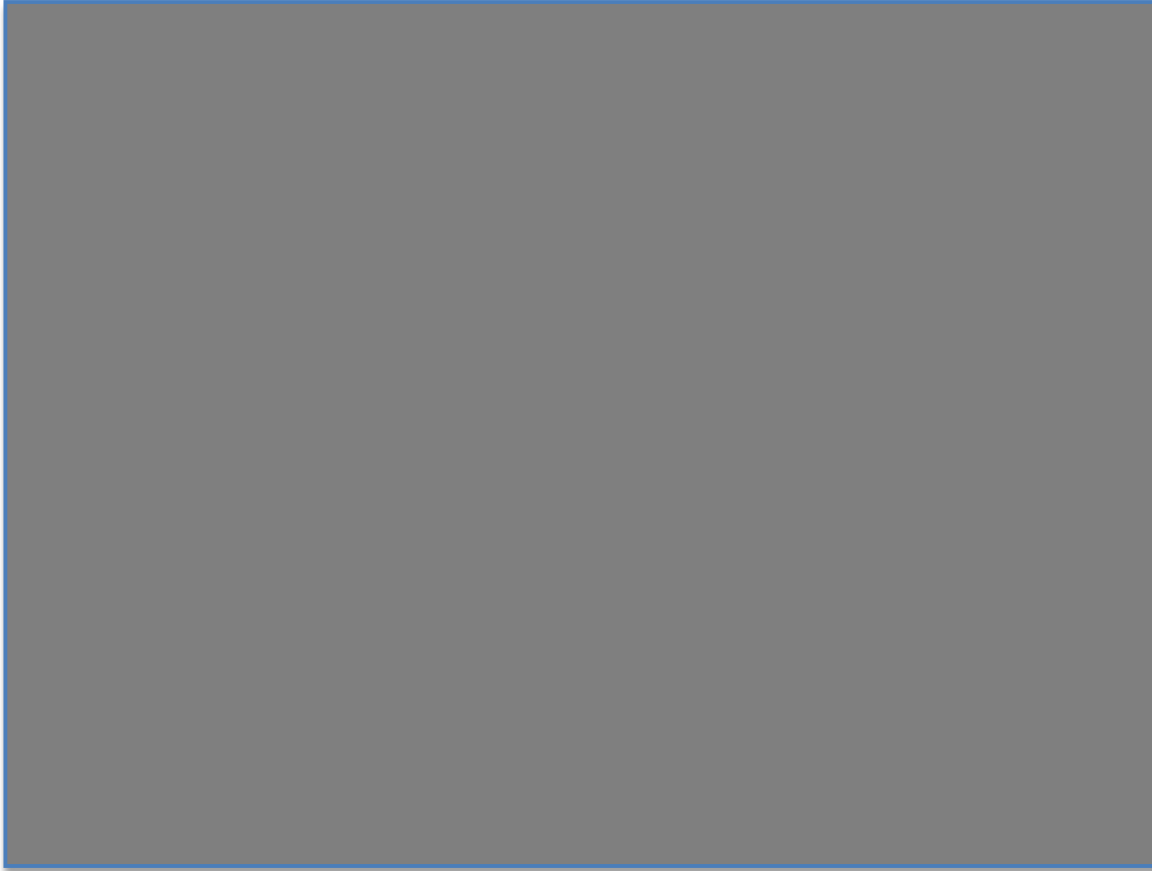


Fig. 6 Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison, *Cloud Cleaner*, 2005.

Concern for the environment and our relationship with nature is another motivation of my artwork. My aversion to most technologies and our fast-paced, modern way of life is rooted in the likelihood that our obsession for comfort and immediate gratification will be our downfall. The philosophical question of existence, our purpose, and our place in the universe is a driving force for me as it is for the ParkeHarrisons. I believe that we will never learn from our mistakes, and that our constant increasing reliance on technology is a dangerous route from which we may never return. This was the conceptual catalyst for the part of the animation entitled *Now we fill the wondrous vastness* (Fig. 7). The imagery is based on all of the traceable space debris currently surrounding our planet; despite our quest for the understanding of the cosmos, we are

treating space with the same irreverence as we do our own planet – leaving our refuse behind to be the problem of a future generation. The image is constructed of monofilament, which differs from the silk embroidery floss of the comet (to be discussed later), and the pressure prints are pulled with far greater pressure on the press than that of the comet.



Fig. 7 monofilament test for *Now we fill the wondrous vastness*, 2012.

The added pressure emphasizes the connections between the tied French knots – the monofilament between each knot is represented as a connection line on the pressure print. As a result, the image seems far more scientific and cold, chaotic and unsettling, shown in sharp relief to the romantic beauty of the comet imagery. By emphasizing the beauty of the natural world both the ParkeHarrisons and I hope to remind our viewers that our small existence in the balance of nature demands our respect.

Conclusion of Concepts

In each of these artists there is a conceptual link that ties their work to my own – an attempt to visualize the unfathomable, whether it be represented through the vast imagery of nature and the universe, our experience and perception of phenomena, or humanity's destructive relationship with nature. Each calls attention to that which we cannot fully understand or conceive, and in doing so, reminds us of the wonder of the natural world and simultaneously speaks of our insignificance, asserting that our existence on this earth is a wonder worthy of celebration and awe.

Chapter Two: Process and Labor

My studio practice is largely interdisciplinary and relies heavily on time-intensive processes. I work with fiber techniques including embroidery, weaving, and papermaking, as well as bookbinding methods to create structures and containers, and printmaking techniques including pressure prints. The beginnings of my artistic practice were in photography and cinematography, and these sensibilities still make their mark on my work in process and through the use of light, narrative sequencing, and stop-motion animation.

Process

The animations contain two opposing images that served as the conceptual catalyst for the project: one of a comet discovered in 1874 by the French astronomer Coggia, and the other of space debris currently in our planet's orbit. The frames are composed of pressure prints from embroidered paper that record the passage of time and the accumulation of stitches as the two images are formed. (Fig. 8) These pressure prints are created on a Vandercook letterpress, by laying ink on the press bed atop a board constructed of plexi-glass and wood, and using a flexible matrix that is built with dimensional layers as the image plate. The "plate" is run through the press under the paper on which the maker is printing, and the pressure of the press creates the image through the transfer of the ink. The parts of the matrix with the highest dimensionality, in this case the embroidered areas, receive the darkest tone. Ultimately, every pressure print made during the labor-intensive embroidery process is photographed to create the stop-

motion animations. In this way, not only is the embroidery a lengthy and meditative process, but also the printing, photographing, and editing of the animation.

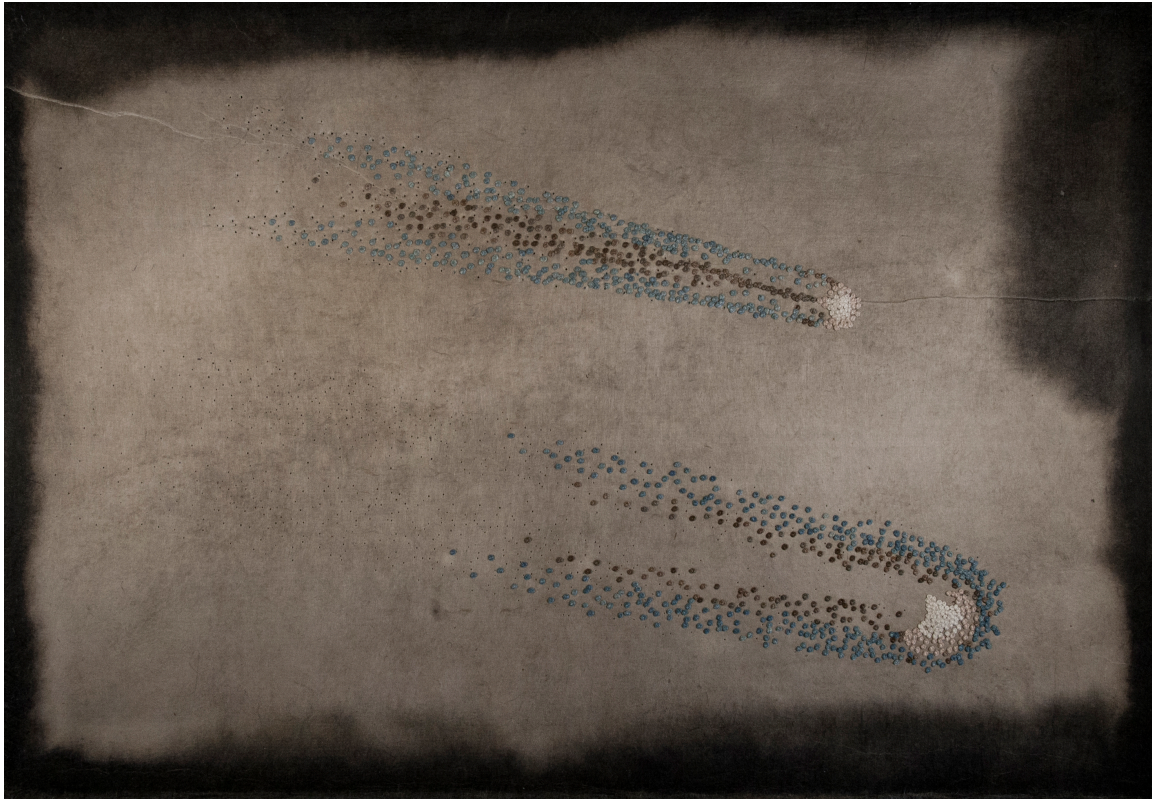


Fig. 8 Embroidered paper panel for *Once the wondrous vastness filled us*, 2013

Process and its Relation to Content

Vija Celmins is a Latvian-American artist for whom meditative labor is also essential. Working in drawing and printmaking, she is known for devoting a year to the creation of a single piece eerily accurate in its realism. Her content is as much about the process of creating the image as it is about the image itself; the time devoted imbues the work with her content, which she has described as a “record of mindfulness.” The techniques Celmins employs run the gamut from incredibly detailed, photo-realistic graphite drawings to large two-paneled mezzotints as seen in her piece *Starfield* (2012)

(Fig. 9), an image of the immeasurable reaches of space carefully realized through mezzotint with the aid of dry point.

Celmins's works also relate to the aesthetic movement of the Sublime, which conveyed greatness beyond fathoming or calculation. Celmins was included in an exhibition entitled *The Sea and the Sky* that brought together works by many contemporary artists working in this subject matter, co-presented by the Beaver College (now Arcadia University) Art Gallery in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin. In Susan Stewart's essay for the exhibition catalog, "What Thought is Like?", Stewart described Celmins's work as "looking at an after-image of the artist's purposeful activity, a reframing of a visual experience as an experience of thinking." (Stewart 21) Her subject matter shares correlations with my own as her images are of natural wonders and immense expanses of space: oceans that seem to extend forever in space, skies that have no horizon or vantage point. (Fig. 10)



Fig.9 Vija Celmins, *Starfield*, mezzotint, 2010, 23 x 32".

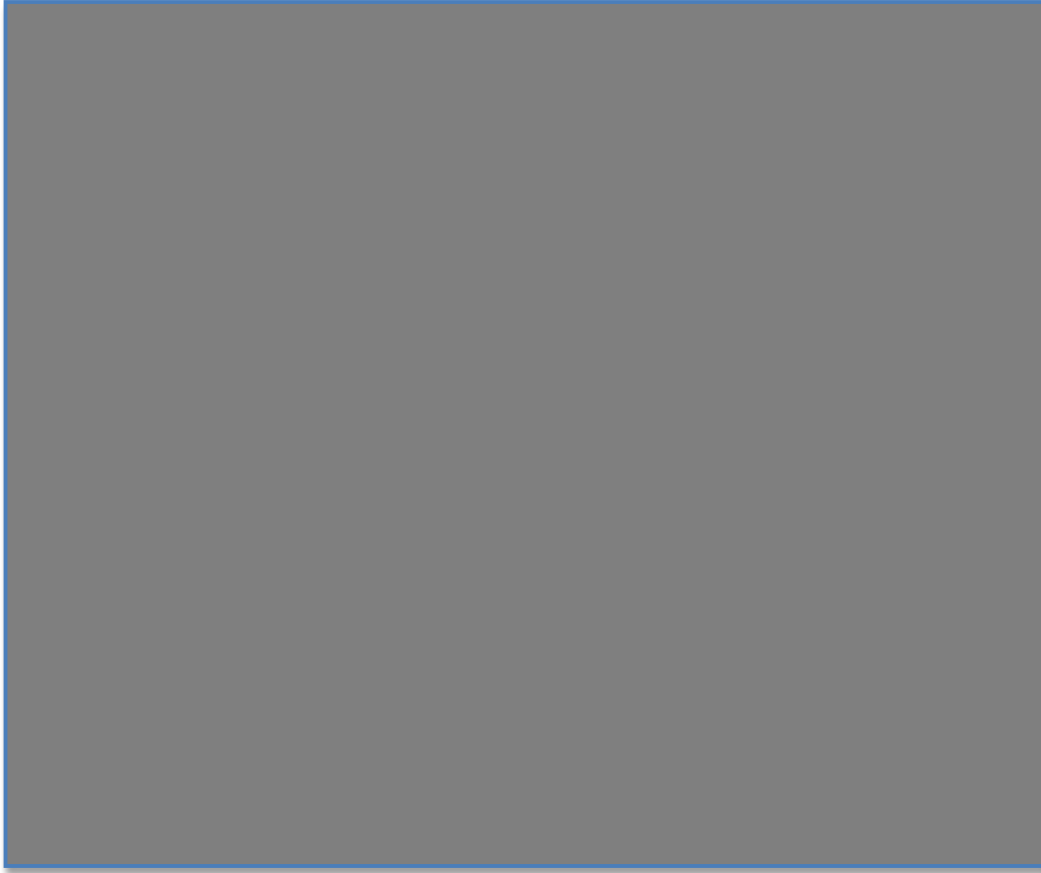


Fig. 10 Vija Celmins, *Night Sky 3*, 2002, aquatint with burnishing and dry point, 14 x 18".

Henry David Thoreau made similar observations:

“What is your thought like? That is the hue, that the purity, and transparency, and distance from earthly taint of my inmost mind, for whatever we see without is a symbol of something within, and that which is farthest off is the symbol of what is deepest within. The lover of contemplation, accordingly, will gaze much into the sky.” (Thoreau 1852)

My thesis, entitled *farthest away, deepest within*, deeply resonates with these ideas. It is comprised of two stop-motion embroidery animations of pressure prints taken from embroidered paper panels, with imagery referencing comets and space debris, and a separate piece, an embroidery of a nebula. To make the animation, a pressure print was

pulled in stages throughout the embroidery, so that the linking of the prints in sequence shows the imagery being formed (and being destroyed, in the case of the comet). I use this imagery as a metaphor to express the human condition, and the existential queries that face us as a species.

Time Investment

Each of Celmins's works requires a time investment from which many artists would abstain. The choice of a labor-intensive process serves as the point of creation for both of our works, many of which express their content through a visual simplicity frequently in opposition to the complexity of their making. The text panel describing *Starfield* in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City spoke to this: "Composed from two equal-sized etching plates, the print – like much of Celmins's work – makes its construction evident, creating a dynamic between its uncanny realism and its obvious assembly by the artist." MOMA curator Ann Temkin has spoken to Celmins about her process, and has said, "She talks about building a painting like building a house. You know, it's her hands, it's constructed, it's human sweat and also human love." (Temkin) Celmins makes no attempts to hide her process, allowing the viewer an understanding of the time invested, helping to imbue the images with her intended content.

Invested time is also essential to the content of my work, and like Celmins, the process is not hidden, but is considered part of the content. My thesis animations, *Once the wondrous vastness filled us, Now we fill the wondrous vastness* are shown with the paper matrixes that served as the image plates for the pressure prints. The silk embroidery

floss that made up the comet imagery of *Once the wondrous vastness filled us* before it was slowly cut away to demonstrate the disappearance of the comet in the stop motion animation, was saved and is now contained in a glass bottle exhibited with the work as a reminder of the time and effort invested. (Fig. 11) My work also speaks to the sublime because it references humanity's insignificance in the vastness of nature, through the choice of my imagery but also through the time-intensive processes I utilize.



Fig. 11 from *Once the wondrous vastness filled us*, found object, silk thread.

Reflection and its Role in Process

One of my process interests is the idea of a copy, or a reflection. It is not only the process of reflection that influences my work, but also the *concept* of reflection. The definition of the word is more than that of a likeness or mirror image; it is also a considered idea, a careful thought, and in these meanings reflection aligns itself with the methods of my conceptual development, through my considered decisions of process and

materials. I am reminded of Vija Celmins's description of her own work, as it is also applicable to mine; both of our artistic practices serve as a "record of mindfulness."

Reflection is represented in my work through the use of copying. One process serves as a recording of a moment in time originally created through a different process, much as a photograph captures a fleeting, impermanent scene. After choosing the two images, the comet and the space debris, I punched holes into a handmade kozo paper with an awl, establishing the location of future French knots that would comprise the image. I then chose my materials for the embroidery: silk thread for the comet, and monofilament for the space debris. As I stitched the knots, I paused and tied off after the completion of a few to make a pressure print of the embroidery in progress. The comet's silk knots represent as a pure dot of color (yellow to orange) in the pressure print, almost a photographic transfer of a pinpoint of light showing through the paper. (Fig. 12) The monofilament knots of the space debris represent as imperfect, harsh impressions in fields of pale grey and blue, with their connection lines ever-present. (Fig. 13)

Each individual pressure print is a frame of the animation, and serves as a record of a moment in the embroidery's construction. Every print is a copy of the embroidered paper and captures that instant in time, similarly to that of a photograph, but through the use of pressure, ink, and paper instead of exposure duration, light, and film. This method results in hundreds of individual prints, which then undergo another process of copying: they are each photographed and edited together in a stop-motion animation, demonstrating the growth of the image. Ultimately, the work is exhibited to the viewer via one last reflection: a projection in the gallery space.



Fig. 12 Pressure print from *Once the wondrous vastness filled us*, 2013



Fig. 13 Pressure print from *Now we fill the wondrous vastness*, 2013

This process can also be described as a slow diminishment of the tangible. Each step is a further copy from the original, a pale representation that degrades further from the mark of the human hand. From the embroidery that exists in a three-dimensional space to the creation of the two-dimensional pressure print to the final projection with no permanent hold in the physical realm, each reflection distances the viewer further from the physical process that created it. This removal of tangibility references our modern technological era and our allowance of a growing withdrawal from reality – an acceptance of disconnection.

In the animations, the comet image is first embroidered to show the growth of the comet, and then the knots are cut away to represent the melting of the comet into nothing. It is a process that elicits a pertinent question: why work in a technique that requires hours of work, just to undo that invested time by cutting away the embroidered image? Ultimately, the paper is left only with its original punched holes, the pressure prints and animation serving as the lone evidence for the hours of tangible construction invested. (Fig. 14) In my artwork, the commitment of time relates to our struggle to find the answers to our existential queries; the element of labor invested serves as a metaphor for grappling with our smallness in the vastness of the cosmos. Repetitive motion represents the endeavors of humanity and our attempts to overcome our insignificance, and serves as a reminder of our need for connection. The disappearance of that repetitive motion is a warning of how quickly our place in the universe can cease to exist. By removing the physical evidence of those intensive hours of work, I want to emphasize that our place in the universe is just as transient as the vanishing comet seen in the animation.

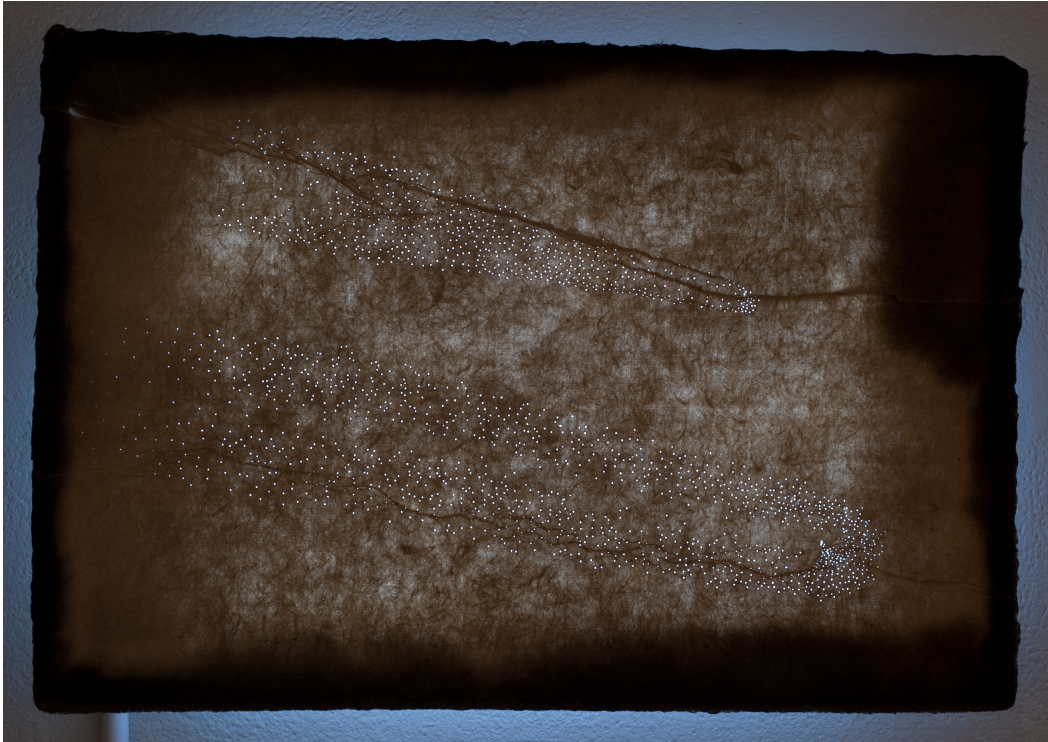


Fig. 14 pressure plate with holes punched, from *Once the wondrous vastness filled us*.

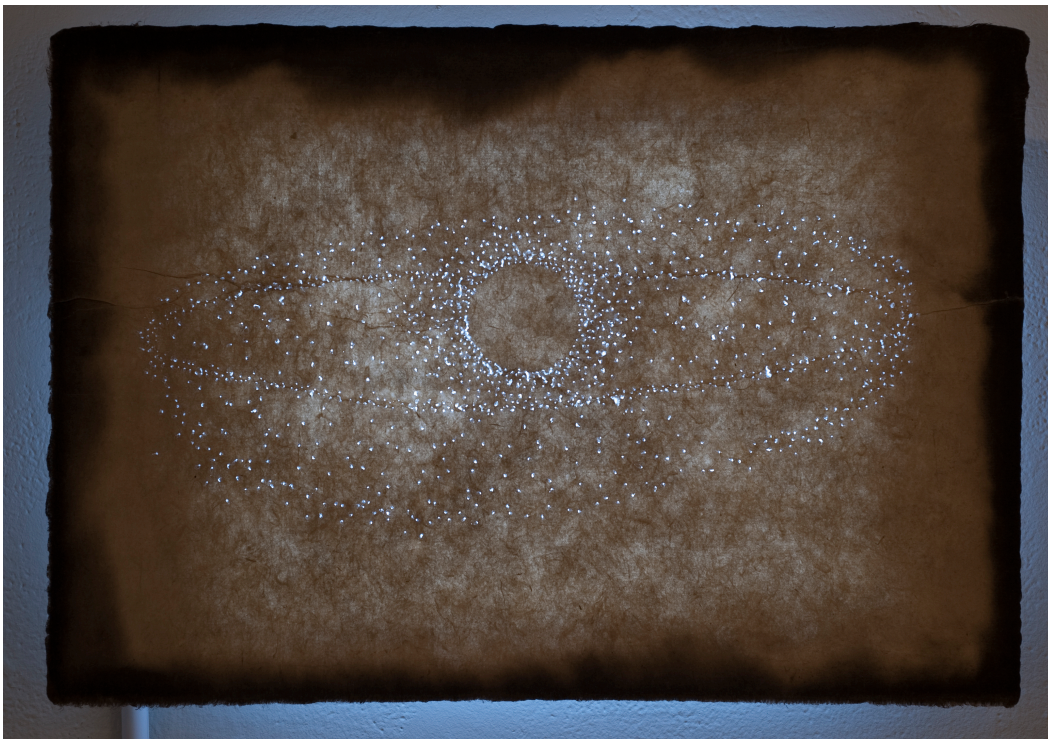


Fig. 15 pressure plate with holes punched, monofilament, from *Now we fill the wondrous vastness*.

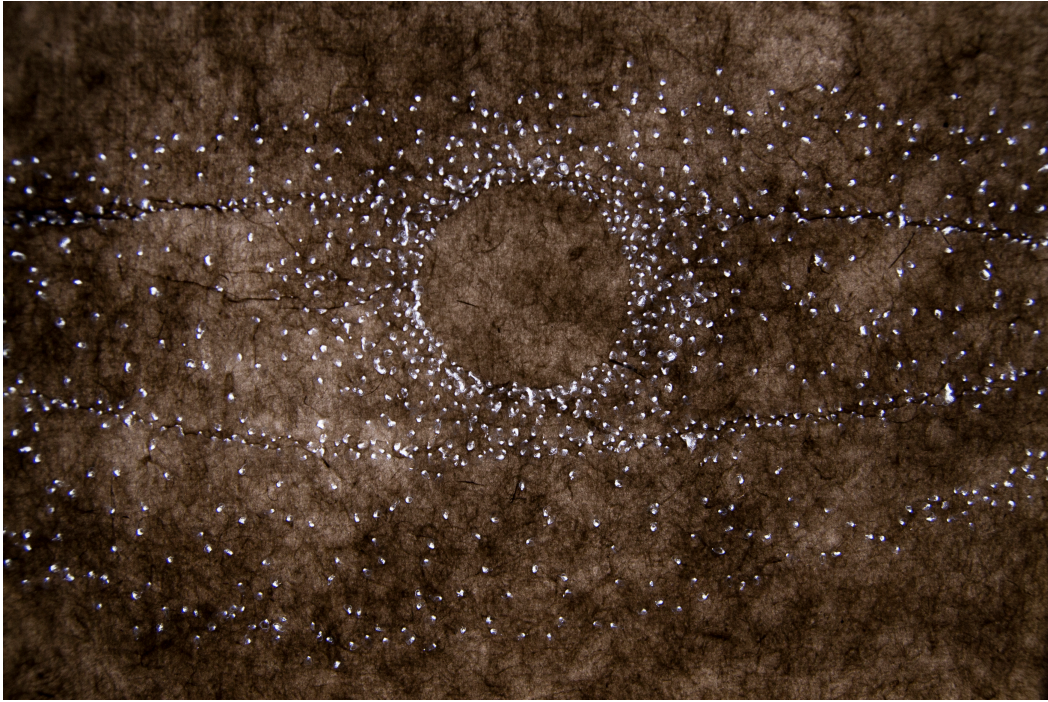


Fig. 16 detail of pressure plate from *Now we fill the wondrous vastness*.

Choice of Materials

Most often, fiber serves as my support material. The choice between paper and fabric is based on the project's necessary process. Many of my materials call to mind other methods; if I use paper as my substrate, it is almost exclusively handmade paper, sometimes made by me. In this particular case, the pressure prints comprising my animations were made using matrixes of handmade kozo paper purchased from a family paper mill outside of Seoul, South Korea. (Figs. 14 – 16) If I work with thread, it is often hand-dyed silk thread. These materials are born from process before I even begin to manipulate them in my own work, further emphasizing the labor-intensive process. An exception is the choice of monofilament for the stitching of the space debris animation; it was chosen in counterpoint to the silk thread. Unlike the hand-dyed silk, monofilament is a substance devoid of the human hand in its original production, emphasizing the

disconnection between the two images. The pressure prints for the animations are another exception. They are made on a commercially manufactured paper, to further distance their reflection from the original handmade paper panel serving as the underlying base for the embroidery.

Beyond the notion of process imbedded in the choice of a material, I also base decisions on the origin of the substance. The feel of handmade paper is incomparable to that of commercially manufactured, but their differences reference more than their quality. Through its making, handmade paper speaks to the value of invested time. The maker first starts with beaten fiber, already transformed from its original plant source. Using a mould and deckle, the maker lifts the fibers from their vat of water, shaking and positioning them to a perfect interlocking atop their mould. It is a process that requires a natural, intuitive relaxation in the maker to produce a perfect sheet, and one with results that cannot always be understood. In these ways, handmade paper shares characteristics with another material often found in my work, silk – slowly spun by an almost otherworldly insect instinctively devoting itself towards the production of a cocoon. I am drawn to these materials because they speak to a history of making, the connections and balance that have allowed our existence, and also suggest a life of their own before they entered my artistic practice.

My piece entitled *Two thousand light years away* (Figs. 17 & 18), is an embroidery of the Southern Ring Nebula shown in miniature (approximately three inches wide), comprised entirely of French knots of hand-dyed silk thread, sewn into a transparent silk fabric. This fabric was once used by paper conservators to “silk” manuscripts, in hopes of stabilizing them for the future. In this way the material speaks to

history and human endeavor on a deeper level – not only in its construction, but also in the purpose it once served, as a way of preserving a record of intellectual thought. I use it as the substrate for a miniature version of a nebula surrounding a dying star – an incomprehensible expanse of space and time that serves as a metaphor for our own ephemeral existence. It is now commonly known amongst conservators that the deterioration of the silk is destructive to the very manuscripts it was meant to protect, an irony that also relates to the inevitable impermanence, and fallibility, of the human condition.

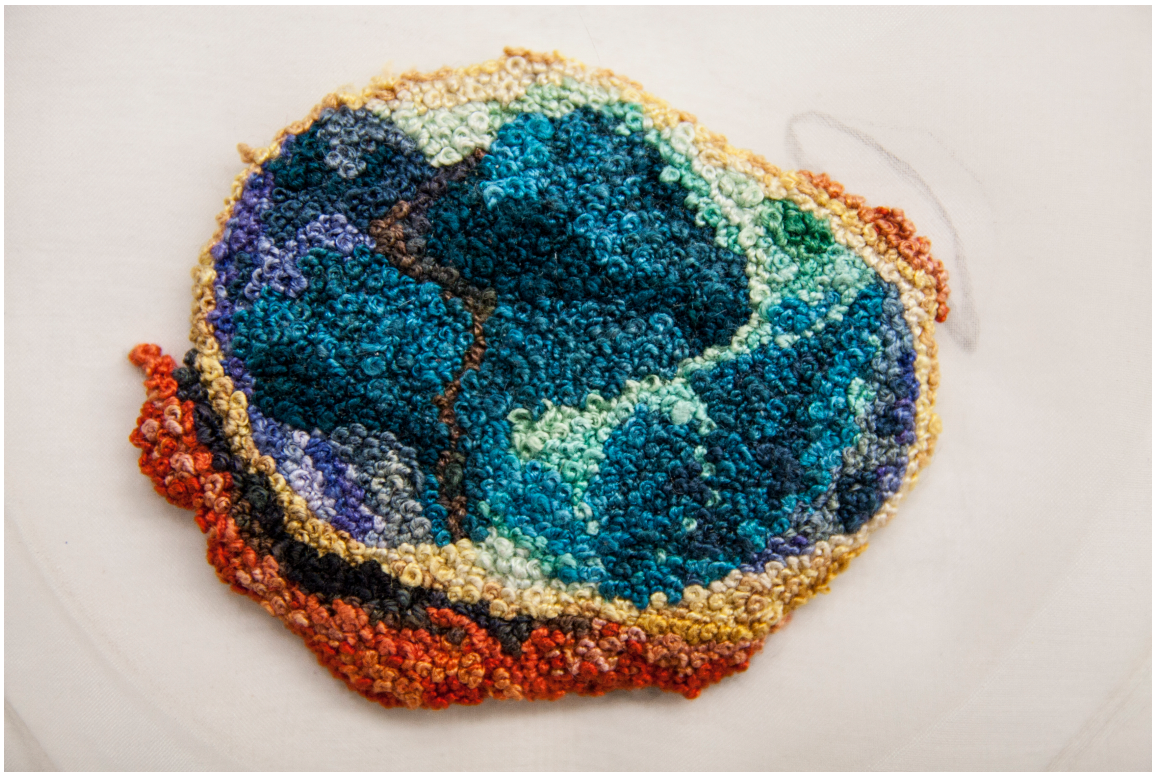


Fig. 17 *Two thousand light-years away*, silk thread on silk fabric, 2013.



Fig. 18 *Two thousand light-years away*, silk thread on silk fabric, different view, 2013.

Chapter Three: Development

Early Development

At an early age I became aware of my deeply embedded neurotic perfectionism. This anxiety increased, developing a series of neurotic behaviors including a debilitating stutter. The discovery of photography at the age of seventeen gave me a practice about which to be passionate, an external desire on which to focus my anxiety and perfectionism. Since that time, my work has been the outlet by which I enforce my determination to never again become unfettered, lose my confidence, or slip into the neuroses of my past. My undergraduate years saw the pursuit of both photography and cinematography, as the latter was a driving force of inspiration in my creative life. Over time I realized that light and imagery were not my only motivations, and the element of

craft began to make itself known through the making of books to house my photographs. I discovered fine binding, a process that requires absolute perfection from the maker in order to yield a successful result. I reveled in infusing every step of the process with exacting technique, and was amazed at the release it provided.

Over the years, the content of my work has evolved often, but certain underlying themes have remained relatively constant. The concentration on craft and technique has remained; I rely on these to imbue my pieces with the effort of their making, serving to convey the concept to viewer. My artwork is a reaction to our modern, technological, fast-paced lifestyle. If a work does not require hours upon hours of planning and labor to complete, I find myself uninterested. William Morris, the renowned textile artist and founder of the Kelmscott Press, put it best in his address of 1882. He believed that it is in our daily labor, our toil, or pride in what we have accomplished, that makes life worth living and provides us our humanity. (Morris) Life is not worth living without daily toil and labor, and I have to agree; my artwork resonates with Morris's ideas.

Graduate School

My graduate studies began with the pursuit of an MFA in Fiber at a small state school an hour and a half outside of Chicago, Illinois. It was during this time that I understood that my need to create revolved around the resolution of an inner turmoil. The physical evidence for this turmoil was my stuttering – an affliction I had suffered from since the age of 12, and that the confidence of art making and an externalized passion allowed me to overcome. This realization led me to devote my entire first year to this topic, and immersing myself in a fiber program also opened my eyes to weaving and embroidery. In turn, I created two substantial projects – a large scale installation weaving

entitled *I can tell you so much more in twenty-five seconds than I ever could before*, and my first artist book entitled *I was screaming and no one could hear*. (Figs. 19 & 20) The former involved two sound waves of my voice reciting the same words, one speaking with a stutter and one speaking with confidence. The production of this weaving, from start to final installation, took five months. The latter was a hand-embroidered sound wave of my voice sewn into handmade kozo paper, which took six weeks of almost constant stitching to produce. It was through the completion of these projects that the investment of time and the concept of process as content became apparent as priorities in my work. The repetitive actions of both embroidery and weaving related to the daily struggle of a stutterer to speak with clarity.



Fig. 19 a spread from *I was screaming and no one could hear*, kozo and stitching, 2011.

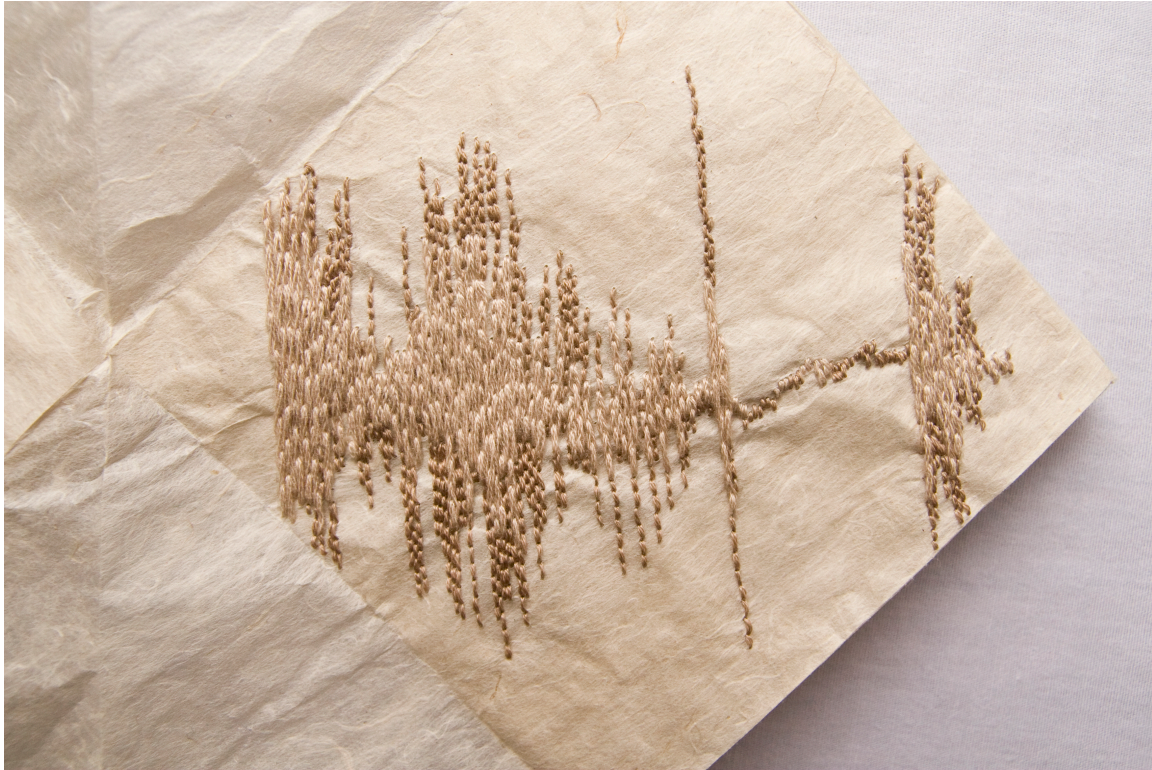


Fig. 20 detail from *I was screaming and no one could hear*, kozo and stitching, 2011.

University of the Arts

Making the decision to change graduate programs allowed me to also progress past my stuttering as the main subject for my work. I instead pursued topics that had always been at the core of my intellectual interest, but as of yet had not found a place in my artwork. My first semester at the University of the Arts saw the elusive concepts of truth, memory, and a record of feelings past or present that I sought to define as a physical presence. This included blending elements of science and sentiment to create the tangible out of the intangible, to represent qualities of the unexplained, of the potential, of the celestial, all relating to an interest in our often inaccurate perceptions of memory.

What is otherwise lost is the first piece that served as a representative of these ideas. It is

a found object – a small vintage chest of drawers, with each drawer holding a small specimen. Each of these is meant to serve as physical evidence of an ephemeral memory previously only part of the ether, and each is presented as an almost a scientific specimen, lending credence to those lost moments in time and giving them a life beyond what those fleeting moments could originally offer. For example, two items are listed as follows in the table of contents found in the first drawer: “*seventeen percent of the fog that enveloped us when we parted and I cried*” (Fig. 21) and “*the space between your sigh and mine.*” (Fig. 22) These both describe moments that would be lost forever if these tangible items had not been made to memorialize and contain them for the future.

A summary of the content of my first year in the Book Arts/Printmaking program can be found in a discussion of the philosophies of Carl Jung. “The brain occupies space, but the things that spring from it – thoughts, emotions, subjective experience – these do not, so far as we can tell, either consist of matter or take up space” (Lawson 79). I wanted to transfer these elusive concepts of “thoughts, emotions, and subjective experience” into a physical presence, defined and contained. Through the development of these subjects, the creation of my work reminded me that I am part of the world, even if I must retreat somewhat from the world to create. In one of his auto-interviews, artist Lucas Samaras shares that sentiment: “Why are you making art? So that I can forget my separateness from everything else.” (Samaras 353)



Fig. 21 on the left: *“seventeen percent of the fog that enveloped us when we parted and I cried”*
from *what is otherwise lost*, 2011.

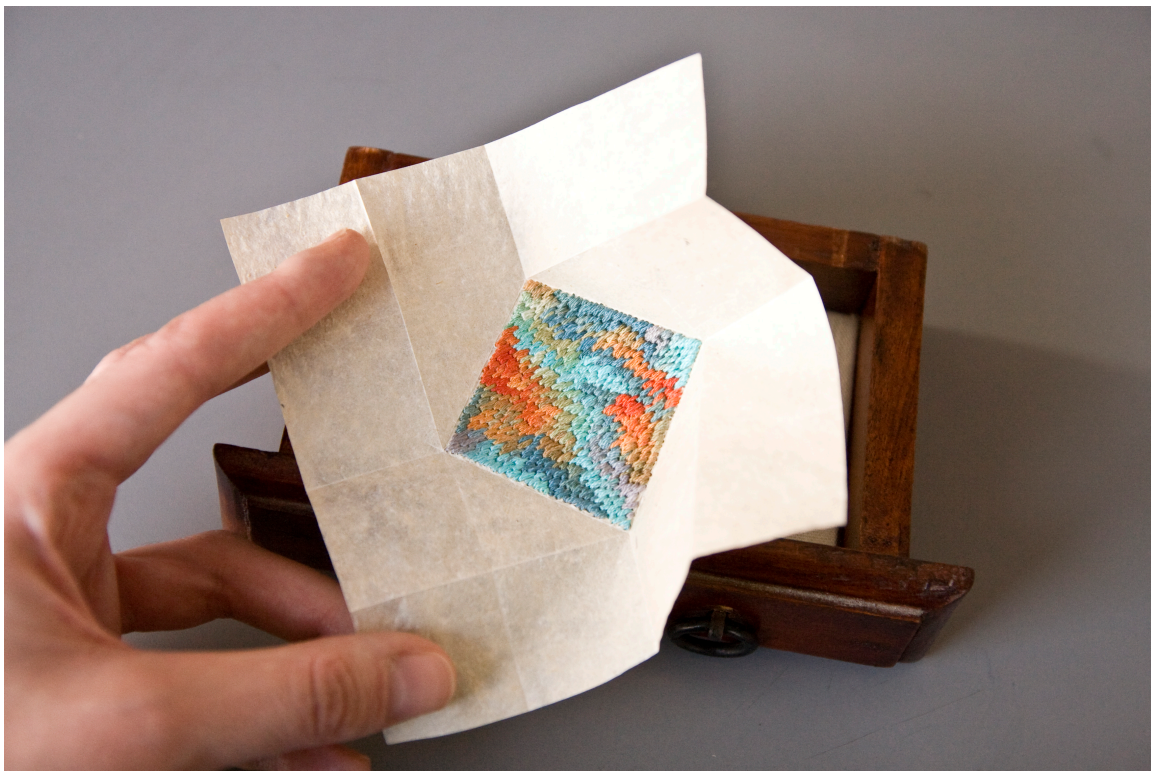


Fig. 22 *“the space between your sigh and mine”* from *what is otherwise lost*, 2011.

Towards the end of the spring semester, 2012, I was encouraged by faculty to move beyond my interest in containers. It was discussed that the vast majority of my concepts would be improved by allowing more air for the work to breathe; that it does not all need to be achieved through viewer interaction, through the opening of closed compartments. As evidence, the faculty referred to my piece entitled *After the sun burned her eyes she found her way* (Fig. 23), an organic sculpture for the wall made of looped steel wire armatures, abaca fiber, and rust, which was a natural effect of the process. The piece was inspired by the feeling of being lost in life, and the eventual discovery of the right path. This piece was made intuitively, without a plan for the overall execution; this was an anomaly in my work at the time, but one that the faculty viewed as a successful departure. I was very resistant to this feedback; I believed that the use of constraints on the work embodied my ideas of composure versus chaos; the outside needed to give the appearance of collected perfection to reveal the deeper meaning within. In hindsight, I now realize that this feedback greatly influenced the next pieces I would create, including the development of my thesis work.



Fig. 23 *After the sun burned her eyes she found her way*, 2012, steel wire, abaca fiber, rust.

Thesis Development

The summer immediately following brought a series of events that served as the catalyst for my thesis work. I visited Ox-bow in Michigan for the Paper and Book Intensive, where I found inspiration and a moment to breathe and relax in nature after a year of intense making. Afterward our program visited Seoul, South Korea, where I allowed for observation and inspiration in a foreign place I had never dreamt of visiting. Outside Seoul we visited Jang Ji Bang, a Korean paper-maker at his studio, where I found two sheets of beautiful, hand-dyed kozo paper that immediately called to mind space and the cosmos. These later served as the matrix for my embroidery and pressure prints. I stood in an ocean for the very first time and felt the waves calling me to their depths. We stayed overnight at a Buddhist temple, where I battled my fear of heights to climb up to a spot of meditation with a spectacular view that took my breath away. These sights elicited a newfound awareness of my insignificance in nature.

Soon after, I spent several nights camping in the Pine Barrens with days spent by the Atlantic Ocean, ever conscious of my tiny person on the edge of an incomprehensible vastness. It was my first time camping, and my first time to swim in an ocean and to fully feel the power of the waves. On the last night, a thunderstorm threatened to destroy the tent, and the overwhelming sound and pressure of the thunder surrounding me was further inspiration and evidence of my insignificance in nature. During each of these experiences I found a way to relinquish control, to let the experience wash over me, to let the events unfold in their natural order. This new understanding of the Sublime, combined with a considered review of all I had made the year prior, led to the discovery of my thesis project.

Conclusion

The most important change that has evolved in my work is a relinquishing of control. As mentioned previously, my former work stemmed from the need to create through controlling every step and detail of my process as a way to subjugate my anxiety. The stop-motion animation that embodies the majority of my thesis work, *Once the wondrous vastness filled us, Now we fill the wondrous vastness* does not only allow for a lack of control – it requires it. The pressure printing process is one that cannot be predicted, cannot be regulated, and, even when deeply involved in the process, the final result (the animation) is unknown. Never before have I allowed such uncertainty in my artistic practice.

This project is the culmination and embodiment of my interests in technique, materials, and concepts throughout graduate school, as I attempt to understand my place in the cosmos. It combines embroidery, paper, printmaking, photography, and filmmaking. In a way, its creation seems inevitable, as if I was working towards this interdisciplinary path all along. In hindsight, it is as if every step of my artistic and conceptual journey has led me here, and every experience over the past couple of years was, in a sense, defining what I would make at this moment. It is an overwhelming realization, and one that I know will guide my work for years to come. It is a reminder that our very existence on this planet is magical, and that the unfolding of events is evidence of the harmony of the cosmos.

“It’s hard for me to see a more profound cosmic connection than the astonishing findings of modern nuclear astrophysics: Except for hydrogen, all the atoms that make each of us up – the iron in our blood, the calcium in our bones, the carbon in our brains – were manufactured in red giant stars thousands of light-years away in space and billions of years ago in time.”

– Carl Sagan

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Selected Exhibitions

2013

- + Erin Paulson: *farthest away, deepest within*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- + Artist Book Cornucopia IV, Abecedarian Gallery, Denver, CO
- + International Book Arts Exhibition: The Garden, Sunchon National University Museum, South Korea
- + MFA Book Arts and Crafts Exhibition in conjunction with Lenore Tawney: Wholly Unlooked For, University of the Arts, Philadelphia
- + Craft Forms 2012, 18th International Juried Exhibition of Contemporary Craft, Wayne Art Center, Wayne, Pennsylvania

2012

- + Modest in Scale, Abecedarian Gallery, Denver, Colorado
- + Juried Exhibition, Center for Contemporary Art, Bedminster, New Jersey
- + Philadelphia Encounter, 175 Gallery, Jongro-gu, Seoul, South Korea
- + About Unfamiliarity & Familiarity, Korea Craft & Design Foundation, Hongro-gu, Seoul
- + University of the Arts Summer Showcase, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2011

- + Crafty Bastards: A Craft and Sculpture Exhibition, 1039 Gallery, Chicago Illinois
- + I Alter, I rectify: Advanced Fibers group show, Bad Dog Gallery, DeKalb, Illinois
- + Shifting the Frame, Northern Illinois University's Glass Gallery, DeKalb, Illinois

2010

- + In Transit, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania's Bates Gallery, Edinboro, Pennsylvania
- + 20 Hors D'oeuvres: MFA Group Show, Pleasant Street Gallery, DeKalb, Illinois

2008 – 2004

- + A Book of Its Own, ArtXposium, West Chicago Public Library, West Chicago, Illinois
- + Manifest: BFA Photography Exhibition, Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
- + Erin Paulson and Patrick Carr: Still, Morpho Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- + Transitions: A Juried Photography Exhibition, Morpho Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- + Erin Paulson and Andrea Petrucelli, The Ante:room, Chicago, Illinois
- + Veins are like wind currents... The Ante:room, Chicago, Illinois

Selected Honors/Awards

- + Director's Award, Abecedarian Gallery, Modest in Scale exhibition December 2012
- + 3rd place award, Center for Contemporary Art, Juried Exhibition November 2012
- + Nell Meldahl Work-Study Scholarship, Paper and Book Intensive May 2012
- + Friends of Arrowmont Scholarship, Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts July 2011
- + Housing Scholarship, American Academy of Bookbinding May 2010 & 2009
- + Work-Study Scholarship, Penland School of Crafts July 2009

Selected Experience

- + Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of the Arts Fall 2011 – present
- + Workshop Instructor, Philadelphia Center for the Book Nov. 2011 – December 2012
- + Guest Artist in Bookbinding, University of Pennsylvania Nov. 2011 – December 2012
- + Conservation Internship, The American Philosophical Society Sept. – December 2012
- + Conservation Internship, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania June - August 2012
- + Conservation Internship, The Newberry Library Summer 2010 & 2011
- + Instructor, Artists' Books, Northern Illinois University January – May 2011
- + Conservation Internship, The Art Institute of Chicago January – August 2010

Collections

- + The University of Louisville
- + Columbia College Chicago

Bibliography

- + Bailey, Alicia. *Modest in Scale Award Recipient Erin Paulson*. December 2012
Abecedarian Gallery Blog
- + *About Unfamiliarity & Familiarity*, Catalog for the exhibition, June 2012
Korea Craft & Design Foundation, Seoul, South Korea

Education

- May 2013 MFA Book Arts and Printmaking, University of the Arts
- May 2007 BFA Photography, Columbia College Chicago, with honors

ARTIST STATEMENT

My studio practice is largely interdisciplinary and relies heavily on time-intensive processes. These include the fiber techniques of embroidery and papermaking, as well as printmaking, bookbinding structures, and the idea of process as content.

Currently I use printmaking to copy or reflect from a time-intensive original as a metaphor for the slow diminishment of the tangible. This speaks to our modern technological era and our allowance of a growing withdrawal from reality – an acceptance of disconnection.

I counter this acceptance through the commitment of intensive hours relating to our struggle to find the answers. In my work, the element of labor invested serves as a metaphor to grapple with our smallness in the vastness of the cosmos. Repetitive motion represents the endeavors of humanity and our attempts to overcome our insignificance, while serving as a reminder of our essential need for connection.